

-VII.

NOTE OF EXCAVATIONS AND DISCOVERIES ON THE TAFTS OF
BAYANN, BELOW SELLAFIRTH, ON BASTAVOE, YELL, SHETLAND.
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On the point of land west of the present house of Bayann, and below Sellafirth, about the period between the years 1833-35, some ancient remains came to light at a spot called the "Tafts" (*i.e.*, the Seats), stones being known to be loosely lying in the cultivated riggs above the brow of the cliff. Mr John Hoseason of Bayann commenced to win stones from here to build a new farm-house across the burn of Leoygie, and also to form a stone beach below the banks, on which to dry salt fish from Gloup fishing station. When his workmen began to raise these stones, many were discovered to be old knocking stones for husking bere; while below others, which were placed in a circle, were found stone

knives, some of which were of an unusual shape, being (so far as the writer's memory goes in the case of one he saw) of a roughly triangular form with a small round hole perforated in one corner, the hole being evidently for a string to pass through. This specimen went afterwards to England. I have never heard of knives of this description having been found anywhere else in Shetland. No care of the remains was taken, nor was there any one on the spot who took special interest in such discoveries. Several of the knocking-stones remained in the constructed beach for years afterwards and may still be there. The writer's remembrance is but from a single casual visit to the place as a boy while the excavations were going on. Fortunately he has been able to obtain an account by another who saw the excavations about the same time.

Miss Margaret B. Jamieson, in a letter to me dated 1st August 1883, states that she remembers very well the finding of these objects, though she was but a child at the time. The men came on a number of stones of a hard quality that had been hollowed out like the old Shetland knocking-stones for shelling or husking the bere which was used instead of *pot-barley*, a luxury unknown to the poor in those days. The hollows in these stones, however, were different from the common form of the knocking-stone, inasmuch as they were oblong instead of being circular in outline. There were also two large quern stones found standing on their edges. Among the stones large quantities of ashes and a considerable number of human bones were found, and a large bank of shells has since been laid open by the inroads of the sea at the same spot. Similar remains were also found opposite the Tafts, at a place called "The Whumblins of Cunnister," where there seems also to have been a group of ancient buildings, though no one showed sufficient interest in them to collect any of the relics.

It may not be uninteresting at the same time to place on record the following memorandum of the occurrence of ancient remains at Norwick in Unst. Mr John Henderson, in a letter to me dated at Norwick, 17th February 1885, states that he lives at the place which is marked on the map as the "Ruins of Bartle's Kirk," and that the site abounds in broken remains of vessels of pottery and stone implements, but he has never seen an entire specimen of either sort. A year or two ago there

was a stone coffin found about two feet under the surface, formed of five slabs, the lid being away, and the cavity measuring little over two feet square. In the bottom there was a thin layer of a brownish stuff resembling ashes. About four yards S.S.W. from it there was a stone about 4 feet in length and 9 inches in diameter, standing on its end with its top near the surface. The lower end of this long stone rested on a flat slab, underneath which was a layer of clay in which the prints of two human feet were distinctly visible. The footmarks were about 10 inches in length and very broad in proportion, from which it was evident that the feet which made them had never been confined in shoes.

In some MS. memoranda by the late Thomas Irvine of Midbrake, there is the following entry regarding Norwick:—"Kirk at Norwick, dedicated to St John, probably one of the earliest built in the country. About two or three feet high of the walls, and an arch which spanned the middle of the building (a very picturesque object), were standing in 1822. The Rev. Mr William Archibald, I believe, preached in it. Some cross-headed grave-stones are in the churchyard. A ruin called Bartle's Kirk is on the north side of the Burn of Troal below Vellie, probably dedicated to St Bartholomew, and locally said to have been built on the site of a heathen temple. The old manse and glebe of Unst was at Norwick, and was called 'Virse.'"